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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 006797

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [IN](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: PM'S KABUL VISIT: TERRIFIC OPPORTUNITY TO WORK  
WITH INDIA ON AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. NEW DELHI 5446

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 6308

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 6695

[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 4124

[1](#)E. KABUL 3508

Classified By: Ambassador David Mulford. Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's August 28-29 visit to Kabul is playing as a resounding foreign policy success in New Delhi. The announced USD 50 million additional assistance, proposals for new areas of cooperation, Parliament ground-breaking and ribbon cutting of the Habibia school all point to closer India-Afghanistan cooperation in the future. The PM used his visit to underline GOI support for Karzai, and appeared to take heed of our earlier advice that New Delhi should be careful not to be perceived as favoring any one ethnic or regional group. New Delhi looks forward to expanding its influence in Afghanistan to cement its credentials as a donor nation and regional power, to ensure against a Taliban resurgence, and to solidify its position to make economic inroads into Central Asia. Competition for influence with Pakistan should not overly concern us; the Indians will be useful to our Afghanistan goals as they, too, abhor the Taliban and are committed to Afghan democracy. Overland transit from India to Afghanistan would be the single most useful transformation in Indo-Pak relations. We recommend using the good will generated by this visit, and MEA's suggestion that we jointly ask the GOA what its requests are, to enlist Indian participation in collaborative assistance projects in Afghanistan. In Kabul, the Indians are wearing the white hats. Let's use them. End Summary.

(Nice) Big Brother Is Here to Stay  
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[1](#)2. (C) New Delhi clearly relishes the image it has earned in Afghanistan as a kindly, generous donor and protector. PM Singh's warm welcome in Kabul was a front page story in nearly all Indian newspapers, and the media have repeatedly highlighted the unprecedented USD 550 million commitment of Indian resources to Afghan reconstruction and assistance. In addition to the PM's public announcement of additional aid, including small-scale village development projects and security assistance for Afghan police (but not ANA -- Ref E), MEA Joint Secretary Dilip Sinha has assured us repeatedly that India is sincere in its offer to provide whatever assistance and training the GOA requests of it.

[1](#)3. (C) Retired diplomat Hamid Ansari, currently a member of the PM's National Security Advisory Board, told Poloff on August 31 that India's economic and assistance relations with Afghanistan are sufficiently mature that a head of government visit was not needed to advance those areas, but Singh's trip to Kabul added a personal dimension to the relationship. The high profile visit was also intended to help bolster Karzai's domestic profile on the eve of Parliamentary elections, he added, illustrating the ambitious role India seeks to play in Afghanistan, and the Indian elites' comfort with Karzai.

Competing with Pakistan for Influence  
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[1](#)4. (C) India's actions in Afghanistan cannot be isolated from the Indo-Pak relationship. The GOI views the persistence of the Taliban as clear evidence of Pakistani designs on Afghanistan. Ansari argued that for a stable Afghanistan, India and Pakistan must recognize that influence in Kabul is not a zero-sum game. "We don't see Afghanistan as our strategic backyard, and we would like Pakistan to realize it is not their strategic backyard either," he claimed. However, Afghan Political Counselor in New Delhi Abdul Shooqufan dismissed concerns about India using Afghanistan as an arena to spar with Pakistan, observing to Poloff that whether or not India tries to gain influence, Pakistan still sees Afghanistan as a field for its activities. (Comment: There is no problem here for us; the Indians hate the Taliban, and all that they stand for. End Comment.)

[1](#)5. (C) Complaining that Pakistan believes that Afghanistan should remain a captive market for its exports, Shooqufan emphasized the importance to Afghanistan of opening an

India-Afghanistan land passage through Pakistan. Afghanistan would like to engage with SAARC, he observed, but this is pointless until Pakistan permits Afghanistan to access the SAARC region across its territory. (Comment: The longer the Indians have to wait for direct access, the more they work with Iran (septel) to get their goods in to Afghanistan and beyond. This trend would end quickly if Pakistan allows such transit. Indeed, MEA's Dilip Sinha complained to us recently that Iran has not been entirely helpful to India's road project from Zaranj to Delaram. End Comment)

#### India-Afghanistan Strategic Relationship?

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16. (C) Shoogufan welcomed increased Indian interest in Afghanistan, pointing out that the Afghan people trust Indians working in Afghanistan far more than they would other nationals. In addition to ongoing GOI development activities, he said Afghanistan would appreciate more Indian concern for Kabul's interests. Illustrating the type of policy support Shoogufan desired, the PM's trip produced headlines in India focusing on Singh's statement that Pakistan must "fall in line" to support better India-Afghanistan ties, and his appeal for a stable Afghanistan as a prerequisite for regional peace.

17. (C) Shoogufan reported that Kabul has suggested entering into a "strategic relationship" with India that would boost Afghanistan on the international stage, but New Delhi has not yet responded to the offer. Ideally, Afghanistan would appreciate cooperation with India at a political level, but not a formal alliance out of deference to Pakistani sensitivities. Shoogufan suggested that New Delhi could use its "good offices" with Moscow and particularly Tehran to help defuse frictions that have affected Kabul's "sensitive" relationships with those capitals.

#### What Next? We Should Partner with India

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18. (C) With the expansive mood in New Delhi following Singh's visit, we have an opportunity to suggest collaborative efforts between the USG and GOI that will provide the greatest support for our goals in Afghanistan. India can offer much in the way of technical assistance and training whose reach could be extended by American support and collaboration. MEA has already invited US participation in a vocational training project that they plan to begin soon (Ref A). Alternatively, India could be asked to contribute in discrete areas in larger US efforts, such as contributing doctors, engineers or development experts to serve on PRTs. Refs B and C point out that Afghanistan is a ripe area for cooperation on the new US-India Global Democracy Initiative, including providing joint support to the Afghan Parliament in the form of training for Parliamentary staff or newly-elected MPs.

19. (C) Informal conversations with MEA Director (Afghanistan) Tsewang Namgyal indicate that the GOI would respond favorably to proposals to establish training or study centers located in Afghan universities. Namgyal suggested that having our two missions in Kabul sit down together with GOA officials to ask them where they would like joint US-India assistance would be the most effective way of identifying opportunities. Mission recommends that we pursue all of these options, particularly focusing on democracy institution and capacity building, for which we will find receptive audiences in New Delhi and Kabul. (Comment: MEA's suggestion that we have a trilateral meeting illustrates how much progress we have made in working with the GOI in Afghanistan. Before our collaboration to work out details of the Kabul to Pul-i-Khumri power transmission line (Ref D), New Delhi had steadfastly refused to consider joint projects. This change of heart is a golden opportunity for us to increase our and India's effectiveness in Afghanistan. End comment)

#### Overland Transit the Holy Grail

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110. (C) Nothing would strengthen New Delhi's efforts to provide assistance and expand its access to Central Asia more than Pakistan allowing overland transit for Indian goods bound for Afghanistan (and beyond). Although we do not need to act as cheerleaders for Indian ambitions to export to Central Asia, it is strongly in the US interest for Pakistan to allow at least the transit of Indian humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. The GOI has repeatedly pointed out that any savings resulting from sending goods through Pakistan instead of Iran will be redirected to development aid for Afghanistan. This would be good for India, good for Afghanistan, good for the US, and good for Pakistan, who would stand to earn fees for providing the transportation. We should press hard for this no-brainer.

111. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:

(<http://www.state.sgov/p/sa/newdelhi>)  
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